DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 190 499 SP 016 269

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TITLE Dimensions of Elementary Education Students' Attitudes about Classroom Management, Student Trust, and Teacher Discipline.
NOTE 12p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Techniques; Discipline; *Education Majors; *Elementary Education; Preservice Teacher Education; *Student Attitudes; Student Behavior; Student Needs; Student Responsibility; *Teacher Effectiveness; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the possibility of identifying groups of basic educational attitudes of preservice elementary education majors who had few field experiences prior to their taking upper level education courses. The attitudes investigated pertained to beliefs about classroom management, student trust, and teacher discipline. Through factor analytic procedures, eight basic factors were delineated. These factors concerned: 1) attitudes about social influences on discipline, 2) student responsibilities in school, 3) influences on disciplinary options, 4) teacher respect and order, 5) student classroom behavior, 6) school rules enforcement, and 7) student punishment procedures. The relevance of these identified factors for elementary teacher educators is discussed. (Author/CJ)

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ED190499

Dimensions of Elementary Education Students' Attitudes About Classroom Management, Student Trust, and Teacher Discipline

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SP016269

Running head: Pre-service Elementary Education Students' Attitudes

ABSTRACT

Dimensions of Elementary Education Students' Attitudes About Classroom Management, Student Trust, and Teacher Discipline

This study investigated the possibility of identifying groups of basic educational attitudes of pre-service elementary education students who had few field experiences prior to their involvement in junior-senior level education courses. The attitudes investigated pertained to beliefs about classroom management, student trust, and teacher discipline. Through factor analytic procedures, eight basic factors were delineated. These factors rleated to attitudes about societal and social influences on discipline, student responsibilities in school, influences on disciplinary options, teacher respect and order, student classroom behaviours, school rules enforcement, and student punishment procedures. The relvance of these identified factors for elementary teacher educators interested in providing alternative options for total teacher education programs is discussed.

DIMENSIONS OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION STUDENTS' ATTITUDES ABOUT CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, STUDENT TRUST, AND TEACHER DISCIPLINE

Teacher education programs are created and maintained on the assumption that the experiences provided pre-service teachers contribute to the creation of an effective, efficient teacher. Critics of teacher education programs reason that if existing programs were adequate, teachers would be performing more effectively in the various roles assigned to them in the classroom. Silberman (6), Broudy (1), and Haynes and Coyne (4), to mention a few, have previously argued that teacher education programs need a vast overhaul before they can deal effectively with the problem of educating teachers in a manner consistent with today's students' needs. Consequently, new or different teacher education programs continue to be created and totally implemented. Various lists of teacher education skills and/or competencies are continually defined, revised, or updated. However, even though literally thousands of studies have been done on the many facets of teacher effectiveness, few have been able to satisfactorily identify what types of teacher education programs produce effective teachers.

Since there still is a lack of supportive research evidence that indicates that one teacher education program is optimal for all students, it seems reasonable to suggest that perhaps differing programs should be devised for various groups of students. Many researchers have noted that no single instructional process if optimal for all students (2, 3). The matching of instructional methods to students' aptitudes is the general area of aptitude-treatment-interaction research. However, this area of research has generally not been applied to overall teacher education programs. A possible reason for this may be the difficulty in identifying aptitudes that may react

differentially with differing teacher education instructional programs.

Experiences with alternative, education programs have shown that similarities exist among the students who select the same optional program. Attention must be given not only to the types of educational experiences, but also to the attitude people bring to educational experiences. If students who choose a particular program share some common attitudes, it is imperative for effective learning to know what those common attributes are and how they might affect learning. Additionally current educational trends such as "open education" and "back to basics" influence students' attitudes. These trends determine in part a person's acceptance and utilization of differing teaching methodologies.

Procedure

Problem: The problem investigated in this study was: Is it possible to identify groups of basic educational attitudes of pre-service elementary education majors who have had few field experiences prior to their involvement in junior-senior level education courses? Consequently, this study investigated the attitude structure of pre-service elementary education majors thus identifying groups of attitude that should be considered when devising alternative teacher education programs. The domain of concern of this study was limited to general attitudes about schools and teaching. No attempt was made to assess views about the nature of the elementary curriculum or the subject matter emphasis since the students involved had not completed any of their elementary education methods courses.

Instrument: The instrument utilized was the PMT Questionnaire (7) which has previously been used to study attitudes of teachers relevant to professed differences in educational philosophies. It exhibits construct validity based

upon scale construction and the predictive results of Wiggins' prior study. It has also been shown to possess split half reliability of 0.91 based upon large samples of in-service elementary teachers. This instrument is a 57 item Likert type response scale. The students rate the items on a 5 point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The PMT Questionnaire possesses three subscales each consisting of 27 items which tap the domain of teachers' attitudes about classroom management and control, use of punishment in the classroom, and trust of students.

Subjects: The students in this study were 84 pre-service elementary education majors at the University of Arizona. The students generally had not completed any of their elementary education methods courses or student teaching. Thus they had little field experience prior to their participation in this study. Consequently, their attitudes relating to the areas of concern were possibly formed from experiences as students instead of as teachers. Approximately 80% of the sample was female and 20% was male.

Statistical Analysis: The student's ratings of the items was assigned a weighted value of one through five which corresponded to the response categories of the instrument. The scores were submitted to factor analysis procedures utilizing principal components factor extraction and orthogonal rotation by the Varimax criterion.

A preliminary factor analysis of the student responses to the PMT Questionnaire was conducted to determine the minimum number of factors that would account for the maximum amount of variance. This preliminary analysis carried out to establish the number of "non-trivial" factors indicated that an eight factor solution was the most meaningful. Consequently, eight principal component factors were extracted from the correlation matrix and

rotated by the Varimax criterion. These eight factors accounted for 44.6% of the total variance on the questionnaire. A complete rotated factor matrix is available from the authors. Overall 46 of the 57 statements loaded significantly on at least one of the eight identified factors. In addition to the 11 items failing to load on any factor, a decision was made to eliminate items loading on more than one factor if the difference between their respective loadings was less than 0.10. Four statements met this criteria. Lastly, items loading in a bipolar manner were maintained and placed on the factors relative to their highest loading. These criteria were established in an attempt to meet the general assumptions of orthogonality and to enhance the interpretation of the factor.

Results: Analysis of the high-loading items on each of the eight factors was used to determine which factors were interpretable. Those items having a factor loading of 0.450 or higher on a given factor were judged to be the most significant in determining the interpretability of each factor. In addition, a factor was deemed to be interpretable if three or more items had factor loadings of 0.450 or higher on that factor. All eight factors were interpretable by this criteria with 35 items determining the interpretability of the factors. Names, descriptions, and factor loading of the items that comprise the eight interpretable factors follow.

Factor 1. This factor, "Societal and social influences on discipline," accounted for 12.8% of the total variance. The highest loading items were "Children who come from poverty areas often exhibit more disciplinary problems than children from middle-class areas." (0.67); "Students arriving in the classroom before the teacher usually misbehave." (0.52); and "Boys create more discipline problems than girls." (0.46).

Factor 2. This factor, "Student responsibilities in school," accounted

for 6.3% of the total variance. The highest loading items were "Most students can be depended upon to evaluate their progress adequately." (0.72); "Students should be permitted to choose their own seating arrangement." (0.70); "If students are allowed freedom to plan a great part of their studies, they will learn better." (0.59); and "Students should be consulted about textbook selection." (0.55).

Factor 3. This factor, "Influences on disciplinary options," accounted for 4.9% of the total variance. The highest loading items were "Students whose parents are prominent leaders in the community usually receive less punishment than the average citizen's children." (0.68); "The subject of most parent-teacher conferences centers around disciplinary problems." (0.67); "Punishment for girls tends to be less severe than boys for the same offense." (0.55); and "Teachers are afraid they might lose their jobs if they allow a permissive atmosphere to exist within their classrooms." (0.60).

Factor 4. This factor, "Teacher respect and order," accounted for 4.7% of the total variance. The highest loading items were "A student who uses obscene or profane language should be corrected immediately." (0.59); "A successful teacher treats all children alike." (0.57); and "Respect for teachers should be expected from all students." (0.54).

Factor 5. This factor, "Student classroom behavior," accounted for 4.4% of the total variance. The highest loading items were "Discipline problems occur more frequently when students work in small groups." (0.66); "Teachers who permit a lot of student interaction and movement do not have good classroom control." (0.59); "Children who employ 'attention seeking' methods should be excluded from group activities." (0.59); and "Student's ideas or suggestions are usually too unrealistic to integrate into the plan of studies." (0.61).

Factor 6. This factor, "School rules enforcement," accounted for 4.1% of

the total variance. The highest loading items were "A teacher usually takes a student with a discipline problem to the principal and expects him to be the disciplinarian." (0.58); "Most school rules should be enforced without exception." (0.49); and "A teacher usually reminds students to be on their best behavior when a visitor enters the class." (0.47).

Factor 7. This factor, "Student punishment," accounted for 3.8% of the total variance. The highest loading items were "Keeping students in after school is an acceptable form of punishment." (0.61); "Scolding a student in front of the class for misbehaving is an acceptable teacher action." (0.61); "Teachers should have the freedom to administer corporal punishment when deemed necessary." (0.51); and "A student who destroys school property should be punished." (0.47).

Factor 8. This factor contained 3 diverse items which were hard to interpret. It did account for 3.6% of the total variance. When the number of factors in a factor solution was limited to seven, the three items did not load heavily on any of the seven identifiable factors. The three items composing this factor were, "College education courses adequately prepare teachers to maintain control of the classroom." (0.59); "Group planning sessions are more successful when the teacher is involved." (0.49); and "Disciplinary problems rarely arise when school work is interesting." (0.45).

Discussion: The factor analytic procedures employed in this study proved to be very useful in the process of reducing and discriminating among pre-service teachers' views on education. Eight factors related to attitudes about student trust, classroom management, school punishment, and teacher control were identified from 57 general educational statements. This is advantageous to teacher education faculties responsible for developing alternative teacher education programs, since the results are based on the analysis of the degree

of association between all pairs of items and the number of factors identified is the result of analysis of empirical data rather than as the result of intuition. The groupings of attitudinal statements indicate that global titles such as open education and basic education do not reveal the whole complexity of pre-service teacher's attitude structure. Teaching units or modules need to be introduced into the undergraduate curriculum that deal more specifically with basic educational concerns. When groups of students ask to discuss classroom discipline, trust, management, or control they may in reality be asking different things. One group may be concerned with "societal influences on discipline" while another may be concerned with "student punishment" or "student classroom behavior". These topics identified by this study can be dealt with more specifically and consequently more relevantly during a student's undergraduate program.

Through formative evaluation, the elementary education department at the University of Arizona has successfully utilized an alternative approach to the "one program for all" teacher education model. In this approach optional programs for elementary education majors have been created and students may choose from the options. These options, based upon differences in educational attitudes and beliefs, have varied in respect to the following components: amount of field experience prior to student teaching, field experiences in specific environments, methodology, amount and kinds of identified seminar discussion topics, and evaluation criteria. The factors identified in this study have proven useful in selecting topics for discussion and in selecting general field experiences for the alternative teacher education programs. Horak and Blecha (5) have previously reported that pre-service elementary teachers show a preference for alternative teaching strategies. The educational attitude factors identified in this analysis should prove useful in

the development of strategies for helping pre-service students integrate their preferred teaching strategies into the total school environment.

Another implication of the study is the potential usefulness of the procedure and findings for development of alternative programs which meet needs of students in vastly differing teacher education environments. The identification of these and other groups of educational attitudes will greatly enhance future teacher education programs and may be a big step in providing the vast overhaul of educational programs some educators (4) have argued must evolve before these programs deal effectively with the problem of educating teachers in a manner consistent with today's students' abilities and needs.

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